

CHINA'S NEW PRESIDENT TELLS OF ITS PROBLEMS

Southern Dissenters and Military Reforms Present Two of Gravest Puzzles, With Finances Next

An interview with President Feng Kuo-chang.
By K. K. KAWAKAMI.

I received word by telephone from the Foreign Department at Peking that his Excellency President Feng Kuo-chang would receive me at 1 o'clock that afternoon at the presidential palace. How simply such arrangements are made these days! Surely China has changed and is changing.

Half an hour earlier than the appointed time I arrived at Hsin Hua Men, the main gate to the palace. Here I was met by a Chinese gentleman in frock coat and after the latest style. He greeted me in such excellent Japanese that I hesitated to speak. The Chinese are remarkable linguists. Of nine Ministers of State in the present Cabinet at least three are able to converse in Japanese with the freedom of the Japanese.

The panoramic view which opened before me within the gate was so fascinating that it made upon my mind an impression which will never fade as long as I live. The lake that spread before me was covered with myriads of lotus blossoms, whose blue and white petals were reflected in the water. This was called the Lotus Lake, the South Sea.

Along the edge of the "sea" ran a splendid driveway leading to the palace. Ancient trees reared their heads at thick foliage, adorning the hills which bordered the driveway. On the further side of the lake stood a cluster of fantastic buildings, forming an inner gate to the presidential palace.

Lotus Path to Palace.

The gentleman who met me at the gate was Mr. Yen Chi-chang, a counselor in the Foreign Office. He was there to escort me to the palace and to interpret for me during the audience. I was told that I could proceed either by riksha or by boat, both of which were placed at the disposal of those privileged to visit the palace precincts. Of course I preferred the picturesque boat to the prosaic man power cart.

The boat was a miniature houseboat decorated with a riot of colors. I went slowly and steadily, ploughing the narrow lane left open through the lotus leaves covering the face of the lake. As we passed a tiny island upon which stood a palace painted in gorgeous hues of gold, red and purple I was told that it was where the late Emperor Dowager Empress lived. The young Emperor, Kwang Hsu, whose progressive ideals incurred her displeasure.

We landed in front of the inner gate, for that was as far as the boat was permitted to go, although the Lotus Lake extends to the North and South seas extending for two or three miles further north. Usually the President receives in the official building, where he attends to affairs of state. The gate before which we stood was the one leading to that building. However, his Excellency had ordered Mr. Yen explained, obliged to receive me in his private quarters, as Lady

Feng's illness prevented his appearance at the administrative palace. And so we took rikshas to the landing and rode half a mile or more, now along the lotus lake, now through rows of picturesque structures, now through gates guarded by soldiers. Finally the rikshas stopped in the middle of a narrow avenue formed by rows of high walls.

President Like a Banker.

In a few minutes we found ourselves in a drawing room of the private quarters of the Chief Executive of the Chinese Republic. What a plain room! There was no elegant furniture such as you find in the White House.

The dozen chairs of western style that we found there were upholstered very plainly, though quite neatly. There was little touch of the artistic. As you of the West would understand the term. As we took seats we noticed through the bamboo screen that hangs between our parlor and the vestibule a foreign physician just arrived to attend Lady Feng.

Before her marriage to General Feng Kuo-chang, Lady Feng was well known as Miss Chow in the palace of the late President Yuan Shih-kai, as she was a tutor to the children of the deceased President. It was through Yuan's advice that Miss Chow and General Feng were united in marriage in 1914, when the General's first wife had passed away.

We did not wait more than ten minutes, when a small man, clad in civilian native costume, entered the room, unattended and with no air of ostentation. Mr. Yen sprang to his feet, and with a bow, addressed the man: "Your Excellency, I beg to present Mr. K. K. Kawakami of America and Japan."

I could hardly believe my ears or my eyes. Was this democratic, unassuming, gentle looking man Marshal Kuo-chang, the President of China? I had expected to find in the President an erect, commanding figure of military bearing. But the man who grasped my hand reminded me of a banker or a merchant rather than a powerful General controlling the famous army at Nanking.

"Your Excellency is the third President I have been privileged to meet," I said with a bow, adding, "The first two Presidents were American Presidents."

Scarcely had Mr. Yen finished interpreting when his Excellency cast a sidelong glance toward me, as if to reproach my impertinence.

No Legislature at Present.

"I do not consider myself a President," he explained with emphasis, "I am simply acting as President. Under the Nanking Provisional Constitution, the Vice-President succeeds to the office of President if for any reason the office becomes vacant. But the succession, to be effective, must be confirmed by the Legislature. Unfortunately the Legislature has been dissolved before I assumed duty as Acting President, and no new Legislature has as yet been organized to confirm me in the office of President."

The President's interesting remarks encouraged me to venture upon the discussion which had meant to avoid.

"Could your Excellency tell me how

the new Legislature will be inaugurated?" I asked.

"The President replied: "That is at present difficult to say. We intend to convene a national council which will perhaps consist of members nominated by provincial Governors, though just how the members will be chosen has not been determined. We shall ask this body to frame a new election law, in accordance with which the members of the new Legislature will be elected. So you see that the Legislature will not be inaugurated very soon."

I had interviewed a number of publicists in Peking, both Chinese and foreign, and the views seemed to agree as to the impracticability of the Nanking Constitution of 1912. It was adopted when the ambitious Yuan Shih-kai had been making a strong bid for the Presidency. The southern republicans had no faith in Yuan and was promulgated with equal haste. A constitution should never be adopted in such disregard of caution and wisdom.

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